



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE TOURS STATE VETERANS HOME

Legislative members of the State Appropriations Committee and staff from the Legislative Research Council toured the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home this week.

MJFSVH Superintendent Chuck Johnson provided them with a tour of the campus and the cemetery, highlighting all the changes that had been made this past year. During his presentation he underscored South Dakota's rich legacy and commitment to take care of our veterans.

Johnson briefed them on staffing challenges the Home faces and the use of temp staff. He also informed them of housing challenges employees face in the Hot Springs community and the need for staff housing to be provided.

Johnson updated the legislators on bed reduction, census, VA per diem, Medicare, caregivers, and technology.

Plant Manager Tom Inman briefed legislators on the bio-mass and solar field and noted the savings the Home experiences from the clean energy.

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# VFW STATE CONVENTION

Veterans from across the state attended the 93rd annual South Dakota Veterans of Foreign Wars and Auxiliary Convention in Mitchell last weekend.

Members in attendance conducted organizational business, discussed legislative issues, and elected leadership. Reports were presented by committees.

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Greg Whitlock provided a department update and briefed the veterans on the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery, the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home,

Fallen Hero Bridge dedications, SDDVA legislative issues, and outreach programs.

TJ Thomas, County Veterans Service Officer for Davison, Hanson, Jerauld, and Sanborn Counties, updated members on veterans benefits and the role of the county/tribal veterans service officer.

Dave Baumiller was elected State Commander, and Pam Vissia was elected state president of the State Auxiliary.

**SDDVA Secretary  
Greg Whitlock**



**Adjutant Anna Arnold**



**TJ Thomas**



# FIRST IN/LAST OUT

"Last Out" is a production of The Heroes Journey that is being presented by The Gary Sinise Foundation in six cities across the United States this year. The shows are free for veteran and first responder communities. The Sioux Falls event will be held at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance July 28-29, 2023.

Last Out was pulled from the experiences of the longest war in American history, a war mostly fought in the shadows. This is a one-act play, with a small cast of combat veterans and military-family members playing multiple roles. An elegy is a lament for the dead, therefore all scenes take place somewhere in the after-life, spanning different times from youth and military career from May 1989 until his death in 2015.

War comes with many costs, some more obvious than others. The physical wounds and loss of life are tragic but visible, and burdens that are readily shared. Unfortunately, there are hundreds of thousands of military veterans and family members for whom the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are still being waged, at home. Their stories are seldom told and rarely understood. This is not only unfortunate, but a threat to our national security and the fabric of our society – but we're changing that.

Throughout history, societies have used storytelling to help warriors integrate back into society, and Last Out follows in that tradition. The mission of this production is to validate the journey of our military veterans and their families while building genuine and well-informed understanding in the communities where they live.

In addition to the play, The Heroes Journey will offer a free storytelling workshop called "The Generosity of Scars" on July 29 from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm (CT).

For more information, please contact the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance (605-271-1582).

**GARY SINISE FOUNDATION**  
PRESENTS  
A Heroes Journey Production

# Last Out

Elegy of a Green Beret  
Sioux Falls, SD  
July 28-29, 2023

"I am honored to support Scott Mann's powerful play *Last Out: Elegy of a Green Beret*. Performed by an amazing cast of all veterans and military family members, it is a war story that shines a light on the sacrifices our veterans and military families make to keep us free. Every American should see this play."

*Gary Sinise*

South Dakota Military  
Heritage Alliance  
1600 W. Russell St.  
Sioux Falls, SD 57104

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT  
[GARYSINISEFOUNDATION.ORG/LAST-OUT](http://GARYSINISEFOUNDATION.ORG/LAST-OUT)

WRITTEN BY  
U.S. ARMY LT. COL. (RET.) SCOTT MANN

DIRECTED BY  
KARL BURY

# NEW LAWS IMPACTING VETERANS IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Hundreds of legislative issues are considered each year by the governor, South Dakota agencies, legislators, constituents, and lobbyists. During the 2023 legislative session, 517 legislative bills and resolutions were introduced.

As an advocate for veterans, it is the responsibility of The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs to review any bills that will impact our veterans. This year we introduced four bills and monitored 32 pieces of proposed legislation. The following veteran-related bills were passed by the state legislature and signed into law by Governor Kristi Noem. They will become law on July 1.

Senate Bill 15 updates the forms and documents that can be used when obtaining veteran designation on a state driver's license or state ID card to include the Uniformed Services ID Card (Retired).

House Bills 1039 and 1046 focus on education. HB 1039 provides eligibility for a 100% reduction in tuition charges at any state supported university for undergraduate programs up to 128 credits and graduate programs up to 32 credits for Guard members that meet the requirements for admission. This 100% tuition reduction could also be applied to one program of study at any state vocational college that has been approved by the South Dakota Board of Education. HB 1046 adds technical colleges as an option for the free tuition for children or spouse of a member of the South Dakota National Guard totally disabled or deceased in the line of duty.

The final two bills involve headstones for deceased veterans. HB 1065 increased the headstone setting fee reimbursement for a federal government headstone or marker set in a private cemetery to \$200. HB 1054 allows the state to pay \$100 for the professional etching of veterans' military information on the back of a privately purchased headstone. The etching on the private stone must include the name, rank, branch of service, and dates of birth and death of the veteran.

When it comes to benefits for veterans, many federal programs are constantly changing and can be very confusing. As always, we encourage all veterans to visit their county or tribal veterans service officers (CTVSOs) and allow them to assist in filing claims. These men and women have worn the boots, walked through trenches, conducted maneuvers, commanded troops, sustained missions, and protected our freedoms. Who better to have on your team? To locate the CTVSO nearest you visit: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteransserviceofficers/locatevso.aspx>.



Greg Whitlock, Secretary  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

# SUICIDE PREVENTION: ADDRESSING SELF-STIGMA TO ELICIT HELP

Most people with mental illness face stigmas at some point. Stigmas can occur when people harbor negative views about things they might not fully understand. Stigmas can arise among friendships, within families, or inside social groups such as co-workers.

Stigmas can be particularly damaging when people begin to internalize an uninformed position and start believing the negative stereotypes that have been developed. Encountering stigmas can be a barrier to recovery as they can increase the incidence of depression, reduce one's sense of self-esteem, or lead an individual to isolation.

"While we will never be able to eliminate barriers, we want to do all that we can to assist individuals to overcome them," DSS Cabinet Secretary Matt Althoff said. "When we can eliminate stigmas associated with mental illness and, in turn, encourage people to reach out for help, we are working toward DSS's goals of assuring access to assistance for all of those in need. The more we discuss the existence of and challenges associated with a person's poor mental health, the more assistance we can provide individuals in overcoming the barrier of stigma."

Addressing self-stigma through supportive interactions with loved ones can also be impactful because statements and actions from people who care usually have a larger impact.

Here are a few tips for loved ones to guide the conversation in addressing self-stigma.

## **Try to Understand**

- Seek to understand the impact it may have on your loved one. If you may have made stigmatizing comments, even if unintentionally, try to recognize this. If it has happened, apologize. An apology can be an invaluable tool to someone hindered by stigma.

## **Use Facts**

- Educate yourself by using credible resources and facts to objectively prove that examples of stigma are false.

## **Respond Thoughtfully**

- Self-stigma is more about how it makes your loved one *feel* rather than whether *it is reasonable* for them to believe the stereotype to be true. Be careful not to dismiss their feelings by saying things like "you shouldn't feel that way" or "why do you feel that way?" as these statements may leave your loved one feeling defensive.

## **Listen**

- Simply listen and most importantly, empathize and validate their emotions. If there is silence or a reply seems natural, use active listening: <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/coaching-others-use-active-listening-skills/>

# FOUR FALLEN HEROES TO BE RECOGNIZED IN JULY

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting four state bridge dedication ceremonies in July.

Two ceremonies will be held July 1. The first will be honoring U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer II Scott A. Saboe. His ceremony will be at 10:00 a.m. (CT) at the Lake Gospel Hall in Willow Lake (105 Lincoln Avenue). The James River Bridge on SD HWY 37, near Huron, will be dedicated to CWII Saboe. The second program will honor U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsman Second Class Charles T. Langenfeld. That ceremony will be at 2:00 p.m. (CT) at the Redlin Art Center in Watertown (1200 33<sup>rd</sup> Street NE #310). The Willow Creek Bridge on East US HWY 212, near Watertown, will be dedicated to HM2 Langenfeld.

On Tuesday, July 4, the northbound I-229 Bridge over S. Minnesota Avenue in Sioux Falls will be dedicated to U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Robb Roling. The ceremony will be at 2:00 p.m. (CT) at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance in Sioux Falls (1600 W. Russell Street).

On Friday, July 7, the Nelson Creek Bridge on SD HWY 50 will be dedicated to U.S. Army Specialist Five Samuel J. Jorgensen. The ceremony will be held at 2:00 p.m. (CT) at the Chamberlain Community Center (112 N. Main Street).

Naming bridges in honor of our combat veterans who died while serving their country is an initiative of Governor Kristi Noem and the South Dakota Departments of Military, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs.

"Whenever and wherever this nation has called, in times of darkness and danger, as well as in times of peace and prosperity, veterans have been there and have proudly carried the torch of liberty for all to see," said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Our fallen heroes are no longer with us, but their memories live on in the hearts of their loved ones and our state," said Whitlock. "Naming our South Dakota bridges in honor of our fallen gives us the opportunity for remembrance, reflection, and respect — for honoring the men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation. They cherished liberty and loved freedom enough to lay down their lives to preserve our way of life."



# **VETERANS CAN NOW CALL 1-800-MYVA411 TO REPORT SEXUAL ASSAULT OR SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT THE VA**

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs announced that veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors can now report incidents of sexual assault or sexual harassment at VA facilities by calling 1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411, option 9).

Whenever someone calls the hotline, they will be able to confidentially report incidents of sexual assault or harassment that occur at VA facilities. The call center will be ready to answer the phones 24/7, and follow-up health care and support will also be made available to those in need.

This new capability is part of the VA's "no wrong door" reporting policy for sexual assault or sexual harassment. Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors are also encouraged to report incidents of sexual harassment or sexual assault as soon as they occur, including while they are still at the VA facility. These incidents can be reported directly to the VA police, VA staff, or local law enforcement, and now also by calling 1-800-MyVA411.

"Maintaining a safe and welcoming environment at all VA facilities for veterans, their caregivers, volunteers, visitors, and employees is a key priority for the Department," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough. "By creating multiple avenues for persons to report sexual harassment or sexual assault incidents, the VA removes barriers to reporting and creates a quicker path for VA to investigate and take appropriate action."

The VA has a zero-tolerance policy for sexual assault and sexual harassment, which means the VA expects and actively works to create a culture free of such incidents. The VA believes that reacting to sexual harassment and assault is not enough; instead, the VA must achieve and sustain a proactively inclusive culture — supported by veteran and employee-centered policy, operations, engagement, training, and technology — such that the VA prevents sexual harassment and sexual assault and ensures an excellent experience for each person the VA serves and employs.



(continued on next page)

# VETERANS CAN NOW CALL

## 1-800-MYVA411 (CONTINUED)

In addition to implementing this hotline, the VA has taken many steps in recent years to prevent and address sexual harassment and sexual assault at VA facilities, and to support survivors. These steps include designating points of contact at VA facilities to accept reports of harassment from veterans and visitors; implementing veteran safety surveys; providing bystander intervention training for staff and veterans; encouraging employees and veterans to take the [White Ribbon VA Pledge](#) to never commit, excuse, or stay silent about sexual harassment, sexual assault, or domestic violence; and requiring facility remediation plans for those that obtain five or more founded sexual assault or sexual harassment incidents during a fiscal year.



The VA also has an active Secretary's Working Group on Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention — a group of Veterans Service Organization representatives, advocates, State Directors of Veterans Affairs, Tribal representatives, VA employees serving in a personal capacity, and survivors of sexual assault and harassment. The input of this group, in addition to the VA's ongoing veteran engagement and outreach efforts, is informing the VA's way forward.

MyVA411 was launched in 2019 and served more than 1.5 million veterans in fiscal year 2022. Customer service representatives answer inquiries, provide directory assistance, document concerns about VA care, benefits, and services, and expedite the referral and resolution of those concerns in addition to processing sexual harassment and sexual assault reports.

To learn more about reporting incidents of sexual harassment or sexual assault, visit [VHA's Assault and Harassment Prevention Office Website](#). For more information about the MyVA411 contact line, visit [1-800-MyVA411: One phone number to reach VA](#).

**Call VA today.**

**1-800-MyVA411**

(1-800-698-2411)

***The number to call when you don't know who to call.***

You only need to remember **one number** for information on **VA care, benefits, and services** or to speak to a **live agent** for assistance!



# UPCOMING EVENTS

Jun 22—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—PFC Cy Kaiser—U.S. Army Reserve Center—(115 S. Roosevelt Street)—Aberdeen—1:30 pm (CT)

Jun 24 —SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SGT Philip Iyotte—Community Events Center—(501 3rd Street)—White River—10:00 am (CT)

Jun 25—3rd Annual Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—Sioux Falls—(starts at the Alliance and ends at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery)—2:00 pm (CT)

Jul 1—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—CW2 Scott A. Saboe—Lake Gospel Hall—(105 Lincoln Avenue)—Willow Lake—10:00 am (CT)

Jul 1—Veterans for Veterans Poker Run—The Depot—(210 S. Main Street)—Mitchell—11:00 am (CT)

Jul 1—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—HM2 Charles T. Langenfeld—Redlin Art Center—(1200 33rd Street NE #310)—Watertown—2:00 pm (CT)

Jul 3-4—State Offices Closed

Jul 4—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SSG Robb Rolwing—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—2:00 pm (CT)

Jul 7—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SP5 Samuel J. Jorgensen—Community Center—(112 N. Main Street)—Chamberlain—2:00 pm (CT)

Jul 17—Tee it Up for the Troops—Arrowhead Country Club—Rapid City—8:00 am (MT)

Jul 19—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Rosalies—(9 8th Avenue E)—Sisseton—9:00 am (CT)

Jul 20—Rosebud Sioux Tribe Veterans Stand Down—Sinte Gleska University—(101 Antelope Circle)—Mission—10:00 am (CT)

Jul 28-29—"Last Out" production—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls

Jul 29-30—Sioux Falls Air Show

Jul 29—Korean War/Defense Veterans Appreciation Day—Brookings County Outdoor Adventure Center—(2810 22nd Avenue S)—Brookings—9:00 am to 3:00 pm (CT)

Aug 10-11—South Dakota Suicide Prevention Conference—Sioux Falls Convention Center

Aug 19—SFVAHCS Show and Shine

Aug 26—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—LTC Gordon J. Lippman—St. Rose of Lima Community Hall—(305 Pine Street)—Hill City—2:00 pm (MT)

Aug 27—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SP5 John P. Beckers—VFW (Main Street)—Burke—2:00 pm (CT)

Aug 28—Barrel House Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight

Aug 31—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair

Aug 31—Sept 4—SD State Fair

Sep 4—State Offices Closed

Sep 5—7—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls

Sep 13-16—Black Hills Veterans March and Marathon

Sep 16—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—LT Peter H. Monfore—Community Hall—(605 8th Street)—Springfield—2:00 pm (CT)

Sep 20—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Rapid City

Sep 26—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 16

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct 7—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—WO1 Roger S. Cameron—Community Building—(311 W. Main)—Pierpont—1:30 pm (CT)  
Oct 7—DAV Fall Conference—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls  
Oct 9—State Offices Closed  
Oct 10—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 17  
Oct 14—SD Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—1LT Thomas M. Martin—Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)  
Oct 21—Elvis Night/50's Dance Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls  
Nov 4—Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair—Sturgis Community Center—11:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)  
Nov 10—State Offices Closed  
Nov 13—Barrel House Day of Giving for SDVC Wreaths Across America  
Nov 15—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Sioux Falls  
Nov 23—State Offices Closed  
Dec 16—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)  
Dec 25—State Offices Closed

## 2024 Events

Jan 10—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Pierre  
Feb 16—18—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Deadwood  
Jun 20—23—American Legion State Conference—Pierre  
Dec 14—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

## 2025 Events

Feb 14—16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma  
Jun 19—22—American Legion State Conference—Huron  
Dec 13—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

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